

AT THE GURNET IN THE WAR OF 1812

Fanny Phillips of Hanover recently addressed the Historic Winslow House Association on "At the Gurnet in the War of 1812."

She is the great-granddaughter of Lt. Ebenezer Simmons, in charge of the group of volunteers who were protecting Plymouth Harbor at Ft. Gurnet in 1812. The War of 1812 was of great importance to the whaling industry of Nantucket. The Federalists called it "Mr. Madison's War."

Miss Phillips, a 1911 graduate of Radcliffe College, taught history for 30 years. Her subject was based on a thorough research of 40 official and 11 personal letters detailing activities of Ft. Gurnet.

The original letters, which belong to the Hanover Historical Society, were a scholarly challenge. She said, as most had no punctuation or capitalization, uncertain spelling and "raggy sentence structure."

Lieutenant Simmons

Simmons (1785-1840) was also a selectman and storekeeper and a giant who "could mow an acre with his scythe before breakfast." First records list 27 men, a second list shows 24 and after March, 1813, only 20 men were posted at the fort, volunteers recruited from Hanover with a few from Marshfield and Duxbury.

Statistics from letters of the fort include the following notations about supplies, pay and rations.

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Among supplies were 20 muskets with bayonets, 20 cartridge boxes, 20 canteens, 20 knapsacks, one drum, one fife, 4 kettles and 2 axes. Lieutenants received \$30 per month plus 2 rations per day, sergeants got \$8 and one ration and privates received \$5 and one ration.

The rations consisted of 1 1/4 pounds of beef, mostly salty beef or 3/4 pound of pork; 18 ounces of flour or bread; whiskey, rum or brandy. Molasses, cigars and sundries could be purchased from Simmons. The recruits were assumed to have their own clothing but were given an allowance of \$32 for clothes.

Strict Discipline

Excerpts from letters describe the fort as "very hot and very cold." From Seth Andrews: there

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is reference to "strict discipline."

A drummer was directed to practice one hour each day, Miss Phillips discovered. His duties were detailed as daylight beat, 8 reveille, sunset retreat, 9 taboo and church call. A formal letter from Jacob Burse requested assistance in recovering a little "demand of \$7, the WHOLE AMOUNT, principal and interest."

Henry Warren, in charge of Plymouth, was requested to "Fire alarm guns" to protect unloading of cargo from the ship India.

A personal letter from Benjamin Richmond, Simmons's brother-in-law, related his "inability to walk" while en route from Utica to Genesee, N.Y. He was "recovered by inward application of whiskey."

More Letters

Albert Smith extends use of his personal library to Simmons, and Sarah Clarke writes to her son entreating him to read the Bible on Sunday to preserve his soul.

This collection of letters at the Hanover Historical Society is an accurate and personal account of our local heritage as interpreted by Miss Phillips.

The Winslow House is open daily, except Tuesday, from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. The house contains an historic wealth of Marshfield and a collection of letters, furnishing and artifacts.